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Approved For Release 2004/03/23 : CIA-RDP82-00400R000300100089-6

IAC-D-100/24

20 September 1956

Validity Study of NIE 11-3-55:

Soviet Capabilities and Probable Soviet Courses

of Action Through 1960,

published 17 May 1955

Since the estimate covered a five-year period, many of its particular statements are not subject to a test of validity. The events of the intervening year and the work done on the successor paper, NIE 11-4-56, permit the conclusion that during its useful life this estimate was basically a sound guide for the most important judgments affecting Soviet capabilities and policy. Like the two previous Soviet estimates, NIE 11-3-55 failed to appreciate the range of the post-Stalin regime's flexibility in both internal and external policy. In addition, a number of specific estimates have had to be revised in producing NIE 11-4-56, and in other respects possible developments were insufficiently emphasized or not anticipated at all. The following more important defects are noted:

1. If current calculations are correct, NIE 11-3-55 underestimated the rate of Soviet economic growth over the period 1955-1960, and implied that military expenditures would constitute more of a problem for Soviet planners than is now believed to be the case. Changes in these estimates which were recorded in NIE 11-4-56 resulted from new data available on 1955 plan fulfillment, on the Sixth Five-Year Plan, and from the study of military costs done for the first time in connection with NIE 11-4-56.

2. NIE 11-3-55 failed to anticipate moves to reduce the size of Soviet military forces, although it apparently carried total military strength at too low a figure for 1955.

3. The rate of introduction of new heavy bomber types to mid-1956 was substantially overestimated, and the build-up in jet medium bombers may have been somewhat underestimated.

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4. The paper estimated that the Soviet reaction to the initiation of West German rearmament would be more forceful than has in fact proved to be the case, and attached too much weight to the possibility of a Soviet withdrawal from East Germany in exchange for neutralization of a united Germany.

5. There was a failure to anticipate the scale and scope of the Soviet program of trade and aid for under-developed countries.

6. The estimate did not adequately anticipate the scale and nature of Soviet activities in the Middle East.

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